



# Reading Jane Eyre through the lens of Raymond Williams

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## INTRODUCTION

Charlotte Brontë's timeless classic, *Jane Eyre*, is a coming of age story where the title character of the novel, Jane undergoes transformation in her life as well as in her character. Most importantly, it depicts how the Dominant, Emergent and the Residual Ideologies contribute in the shaping of a culture and how this in turn affects the growth of an individual. Raymond Williams in his essay titled *Marxism and Literature* talks about a concept known as the Dominant, Residual and Emergent. Raymond Williams who was a Marxist critic, analyses the dynamics of cultural change whose theoretical model is based on an assumption of society being in a state of constant cultural change and negotiation. Emergent Culture refers to the new ways of doing which go against the Dominant Culture and may sometimes overpower the Dominant Culture. Thus, this paper is going to propose how the Dominant, Residual and Emergent Ideologies during the Victorian Era, governs throughout the novel and thus being considered as a bildungsroman novel, the new emerging ideals like women as an independent identity and the emerging ideals of religion in contrast to the prevailing dominant ideology of religion overpowers the dominant notion of religion as an orthodox practice prevalent during the Victorian Era.

Key Words : Dominant, Emergent, Residual, Victorian Era, Culture.

## AIM AND OBJECTIVE :

The main objective of this paper is to highlight the Emerging Ideals during the Victorian Era and how these Emerging Victorian Ideals in a way overpowers the Dominant Ideology of that epoch mainly by emphasizing on the aspects of gender and religion; the two most crucial variables of the Victorian Culture.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

When *Jane Eyre* was first published in 1848 it evoked immediate claim but also some adverse reactions came from journals because of the way the author tackled sensitive political issues and the role of women. For instance, Elizabeth Rigby in the *Quarterly Review* (1848) was harsh in the criticism of her book. She says the character of Jane in *Jane Eyre* is throughout the personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit. In the later Victorian Era, the general assessment of *Jane Eyre* was that it depicts the courage with which a friendless and loving girl confronts her own passion. There are also several Marxist and Socio-Economic interpretations of the novel. For instance, the general Marxist notion of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat that is the haves and the haves not wherein the novel is interpreted in the light of unequal power relations and how the prevailing inequality, leads to the sufferings of the 'other'.

**RESEARCH GAP:**

There are certain loopholes in the findings that has not been catered to in analysing Charlotte Bronte's novel, *Jane Eyre*. For instance, if we look into the notion of culture, which is a dynamic process and the culture in the Victorian Era which was characterised by Victorian temper and prudishness. Jane in the novel is seen to be questioning the laid down Victorian norms and ideals, but when looked deeply into the novel, one can see how the three variables of culture as given by Raymond Williams namely the Dominant, Emergent and Residual, are constantly seen to be in conflict with one another. Thus, this paper shall propose the research gap of the emergent culture overpowering the dominant culture and how this in a way leads to the growth of a character in the novel as an individual.

**RESEARCH QUESTION:**

How the different forces of culture are constantly at work and how this in a way makes the novel *Jane Eyre* as a bildungsroman novel?

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

In this research paper, the descriptive analytical method is used. It traces the growth of the central character in the novel *Jane Eyre*; in context with the epochal cultural analysis, and how the Dominant Ideology can be challenged by the Emerging Ideologies which stands in opposition to the Dominant Ideology.

**ANALYSIS:**

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* was written at a time when society was deeply entrenched and still wrestling with the upshots of the workers' revolution that shook the 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Jane in the novel is continuously made aware of her class status in the Reeds' household. Moreover the Marxist Ideology which emphasizes the notion of a classless society can be questioned in this regard since with the advent of Industrial Revolution during the Victorian Era in England, the practice of capitalism came in forefront in the Victorian society. A capitalistic society always work on the basis of power relations and it is in this context that the idea of Dominant, Residual and Emergent Culture comes to play.

For instance, the dominant culture that was prevalent during the Victorian Era can be studied from two aspects namely, from the point of view of gender and from the point of view of religion.

For instance, if we look in the aspect of gender, the dominant culture associated with it or prevalent during the era was the Victorian convention of angel in the house and her dependence on the male figure. Charlotte Bronte in a way revolts against the inequality between men and women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She portrays this rejection in *Jane Eyre*'s resistant behaviour. Instead of being enslaved by John Reeds and calling him a master, she calls him Nero, the roman dictator.

Jane's first meeting with Rochester is significant.

"Necessity compels me to make you useful". He laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, and leaning on me with some stress, limped to his horse. Having once caught the bridle, he mastered it directly, and sprang to his saddle; grimacing grimly as he made the effort, for it wrenched his spirit. *Jane Eyre*( p.98)

From the words above which indicates Rochester's superiority towards all people, because of his position as the master of Thornfield. However, Rochester's fall from the back of the horse is remarkable and symbolical. His fall in a way implies the collapse of traditional Victorian status of men. For instance, Jane is portrayed as a clear offer of assistance to Rochester, and this in a way portrays that man too needs woman's support unlike the traditional or the Dominant Victorian ideology of the patriarch man superior in the society and the notion of Victorian men's hierarchy.

Charlotte Bronte also addresses the traditional victorian gender roles. For instance when Jane says Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrowminded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing of the piano and more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessarily for their sex. Jane Eyre (p.93)

The above passage presents Jane Eyre's thoughts as Charlotte Bronte's mouthpiece on the aspect of gender roles. The 19<sup>th</sup> century women were supposed to be calm and confined themselves to pudding and knitting stockings, playing on the piano, and embroidering bags that were the domestic sphere's roles. Thus Charlotte Bronte in a way questions the laid down or the dominant victorian norms and thereby portays Jane who refuses to marry Rochester as an unequal like a mistress. She proclaims to Rochester that :

"I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh- it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,- as we are". Jane Eyre (p.216)

In the aspect of religion too, Jane in the novel Jane Eyre portrays a virtuous faith that does not consume her individual personality. Jane is self- respecting and religious, but also exercises her freedom to love and feel. Thus in the context of religion we see the emergent culture of religious unorthodoxy in contrast to the mere religious orthodoxy. Since in the end of the novel we notice that Jane when being urged by St. John Reeds to accompany him as a missionary wife, in the pursuit of preaching Christian religion, we notice how Jane firmly denies and refuses and at end of the novel we see Jane going towards Rochester thus, highlighting the practice of following religion in her own independent way and not in an orthodox manner.

Thus, the Dominant Culture in the context of gender and religion is being questioned by Bronte and moreover one can also find traces of Residual Culture during the Victorian Era as highlighted by various characters such as Helen Burns, Mr. Brocklehurst, St. John Reeds.

#### CONCLUSION:

It can be inferred that Charlotte Bronte had succeeded in creating an ambitious character of Jane in *Jane Eyre*, who battles for her freedom and refutes the Dominant Model of Victorian life. Thus the three variables of culture as put forwarded by Raymond Williams are constantly at work and thereby helps in highlighting the temperament of the age and thus in a piece of literary work it plays a significant role in the growth and development of the characters.

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